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Despite the best efforts of our government to make it appear otherwise, the Vietnam war remains the most urgent foreign policy problem of the United States and the most corrosive influence on our domestic life. Thousands of lives--American, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Lao--are being lost every week in a war whose legitimacy few Americans now seem to uphold.

The times demand extraordinary action if the policies of the United States are to change and finally embrace termination of American involvement in Indochina as our overriding and essential objective. All of us should be grateful that a man has responded, at personal risk to his future freedom, in order that the people may know the full extent of our tragic involvement in Vietnam from 1945 to 1968. The divulgence of the classified documents concerning U.S. decision-making on the war, and the decision of the major newspapers to publish them, are a national service in the highest traditions of patriotism.

The significance of the so-called Pentagon Papers goes well beyond history. They draw the attention of persons inside and outside the administration to the disturbing parallels between past and present. I refer not merely to the Nixon Administration's pursuit of policies which, like those of preceding administrations, are in my judgment infeasible, unwise, and in some cases immoral and reckless. Of greater concern to me is the continuation of a pattern of deception in American policy--deception of the Congress and the American people. The truth about U.S. objectives and activities in Indochina is being distorted or hidden as much now as before--and this circumstance is as intolerable as the policies themselves.

The public record of the Nixon Administration by itself provides an adequate basis for reaching this conclusion. The record shows that, like previous administrations,

(1) this Administration aims at achieving a military victory in Vietnam while professing to be striving for complete withdrawal. The gradual reductions of U.S. ground forces should not divert attention from the expansion and intensification of U.S. air power throughout Indochina, the

creation of a new commitment to the survival of a non-Communist regime in Cambodia, and the support, in contravention of the law (the Fullbright amendment), of South Vietnamese and Thai intervention in Laos.

(2) this Administration is not interested in negotiations to end American involvement except on terms that it knows North Vietnam cannot accept. Calls for mutual troop withdrawals and cease-fires are not meaningful offers to bargain; the Administration surely knows in advance that such proposals, because of the conditions attached to them, will never be acceptable to the other side.

(3) this Administration, while paying lip service to self-determination in South Vietnam, continues to prop up a regime that is taking steps to prevent the holding of competitive elections and the evolution of political accommodations among the contending Vietnamese factions.

(4) this Administration, while expressing concern for the safety and liberation of U.S. prisoners in North Vietnam, is in fact exploiting their captivity for domestic political purposes. The increasing number of POWs in North Vietnam's camps enables the Administration to rationalize the long-term presence of U.S. forces in Indochina and the necessity of escalation in North Vietnam. The Administration knows full well that the POWs will not be returned unless and until the United States sets a specific date for complete withdrawal from Vietnam.

(5) this Administration has wilfully misled the American people to believe that its policies are consistently intended to extricate the United States from the war. It portrays escalation as deescalation and failure as success. Intervention in Cambodia was not a response to a new threat from the sanctuaries but was a U.S.-ARVN initiative to exploit the overthrow of Sihanouk. The widespread use of air power in Cambodia is not designed to speed our troop withdrawals but to support ARVN intervention and to sustain a militarily ineffective, unstable government. "Protective reaction" strikes against North Vietnam are in fact attempts to punish Hanoi for continuing the war; they may also be warnings to Hanoi of U.S. willingness to restart the air war. Finally, the incursions in Laos did not demonstrate the ARVN's improvement but showed, to the contrary, that "Vietnamization"cannot be carried out without heavy U.S. air and logistical support, and cannot succeed even with it.

(6) this Administration's "Vietnamization" policy is primarily a domestic political tactic, not a program for complete withdrawal. Troop reductions are being geared to have maximum impact on the 1972 elections; they have far less to do with ARVN's performance. Moreover, such reductions are meant to distract attention from an unprecedented application of aerial destructiveness that promises not only increasing suffering for the people of the three countries, but also more American prisoners of war.

When a government consistently deceives its people about the purposes of its policies, it must be called to account. The leaders of previous administrations are now being judged by the people as the result of publication of the Pentagon Papers. The fullest divulgence of the truth about present U.S. policies in Indochina can only come, however, when the public and the Congress demand it. The public should insist that their representatives press the Administration to report the extent and purpose of American bombing in northern and southern Laos, and the nature and objectives of U.S. support for South Vietnamese and Thai intervention in Laos and Cambodia. The Congress should enact legislation to overhaul the system governing classified documents. Such legislation might establish a panel of individuals outside the government to monitor and recommend the rapid declassification of noncurrent materials; and it might set up a system to assure automatic receipt of government studies by the relevant Congressional committees.

But the most urgent business of the American people and the Congress is to work for the removal of the United States from the war in Indochina. The Administration must be persuaded to set a definite date for terminating U.S. involvement in return for the release of our prisoners and the unimpeded withdrawal of U.S. forces and bases from South Vietnam. Such an arrangement is clearly obtainable; and public and Congressional pressure to secure it would constitute an appropriate and effective response to nearly twenty years of deceitful and fruitless government policy-making on Indochina.